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AUTHOR Pierce, Randal; Petty, Gregory C.
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ABSTRACT

Parents' involvement in their children's education is needed if schools are to do an adequate job. Both parents and educators support parental involvement, so why are more parents not involved? Some parents do not know how to get involved or do not think they have the time. Others feel they do not have enough education or sophistication to understand school problems, whereas others are intimidated in the schools. On the other side, many educators have not encouraged parent involvement in schools, especially if parents seek to participate in policy making. Schools know how to involve parents at the kindergarten level, but have almost completely abandoned the effort by high school. Ten expectations that parents have of teachers have been identified. They include building students' self-esteem, getting to know each child's needs, assigning homework regularly, setting high academic standards, enforcing positive discipline, trying varied teaching methods and making learning fun, and communicating with parents and encouraging their participation. Some parents need to be taught how they can help in their child's schooling, and the principles of adult education should be followed in coaching them. (KC)

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STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION THROUGH HOME INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Presented at the American Vocational Association Convention
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By

Randal Pierce
and
Gregory C. Petty

The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, Tennessee

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(615) 974-2574

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STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION
THROUGH HOME INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

The editorial headline in The Daily Times November 22, 1989 read "Saturn, Nissan Chief Executives Find Education Inadequate." These corporate leaders met with a panel of business leaders and educators assembled by Governor Ned McWherter to discuss the restructuring of education in Tennessee. Jerry Benefield, president and chief executive officer at Nissan USA in Smyrna, made an insightful comment when he said, "The skills of perspective employees who graduated from the same high school can vary widely. Some are as good as anyone can hope for, and others can hardly read and write." He suggested that some of the problem is from parents who do not value education enough to insist their children complete their homework. This comment points out something all teachers know, not enough parents are involved in their child's education. The focus of this presentation will be to show you from the literature that parent involvement in education is effective and to promote some ways you as technology education teachers can encourage parent involvement.

Here are a few facts you should know regarding parent involvement in education. The students in this country spend 12 years in compulsory schooling. Each year is made up of approximately 180 six hour days. This adds up to 12,960 hours, or about 13% of the waking life of a child's first 18 years. This means that through the formative years, parents control 87% of a child's waking time. Not only is this fraction much larger than the amount of time spent in school, but it also strongly influences the productivity of school time. Extensive evidence suggests that the efficiency of the home in fostering learning has declined for several decades, but cooperative

partnerships between the home and the school can dramatically raise educational productivity (Walberg, 1984).

More than fifty major research studies of the role of parents in education were summarized by Anne Henderson in The Evidence Continues to Grow (1987). These studies revealed that :

- Parents' involvement increases their children's achievement.
- Parents' involvement continues to be important even when students are in high school.
- It isn't enough for parents just to be active in their children's education at home - they must participate at all levels in the schools if the schools are to be of fine quality.
- Parents don't have to be well educated to help their children improve academically.
- Minority and low-income children gain most from having their parents take an active part in their schooling.

A report issued by the Department of Education (1987) confirmed that "What parents do to help their children learn is more important to academic success than how well-off the family is." A recent survey by the National Education Association (1989) found that over 90 percent of teachers want more parent involvement. In fact, parent indifference often rates higher than low teacher salaries as a cause of dissatisfaction for our nation's teachers. The National Parent Teachers Association (PTA) tells us that if you ask parents if they would like to be more actively involved in their child's education, the answer will be overwhelmingly - yes.

So if teachers and parents both see the value of parents involved in their children's schooling, why aren't they? The literature reveals a

complicated answer. Many parents do not know how to get involved or don't think they have the time. Others feel they don't have enough education or sophistication to understand school problems. Some parents have had a bad schooling experience and want nothing to do with the school. Still others feel intimidated or unwelcome in the schools.

On the other side, many educators have tried to shut parents out of the schools. The attitude that prevails seems to say, "leave education to the professionals - the teachers and principals and other staff." Another situation also exists, the parents who work actively with their children at home and support the school by attending school performances, grading papers or chaperoning school trips are welcomed with open arms. But, parents who seek to participate in policy making or oppose any school action receive a less than warm reception.

While some parents will come to the schools with an ax to grind the vast majority will be there seeking to establish a good working relationship. Today, most of us are facing tightening school budgets, declining enrollments in vocational classes, and criticism of the public schools in general. It is now evident that without parent assistance, school budgets will not pass, uninformed parents will not encourage their child(ren) to select vocational education, and without understanding, school criticism will worsen.

When we look at the school's efforts to involve parents it appears we learn how to do it in kindergarten, but we have almost completely abandoned all efforts by the high school experience. There are obvious reasons for some of this loss of touch, but we have given up far too much contact with parents. Most high school teachers today only contact parents through grade reports, to

request permission or money, or to resolve a discipline problem. Much of this limited contact is impersonal and ineffective.

If we as technology teachers look for ways to improve parent involvement, a starting point might be to ask the question, "What is it that parents want teachers to do for their children?" It would seem logical that parents would readily help the school in achieving these goals. In The National PTA Talks to Parents (1989) the following are identified as the ten things parents wish teachers would do:

1. **Building students' self-esteem** by using praise generously, and avoiding ridicule and negative public criticism.
2. **Get to know each child's needs**, interests and special talents, as well as the way each child learns best.
3. **Communicate often and openly with parents**, contacting them early on about academic or behavioral problems and being candid rather than defensive when discussing these problems.
4. **Regularly assign homework** that helps children learn, and advise parents how they can work with their children on this homework.
5. **Set high academic standards**, expecting all students to learn and helping them to do so.
6. **Care about children**, since children learn best when taught by warm, friendly, caring, and enthusiastic teachers.
7. **Treat all children fairly** and not play favorites.
8. **Enforce a positive discipline code** based on clear and fair rules that are established at the beginning of each school year; reinforce positive behavior rather than punish negative behavior.
9. **Vary teaching methods** and make learning fun.

10. **Encourage parent participation** by reaching out to involve parents in their children's education, showing them how they can help their children at home and remembering that parents want to work with teachers to help their children do their best.

A case could be made that each of these items has an element of parent involvement, but at least three (no.'s 3, 4, & 10) definitely open doors for direct parent-school interaction. The remainder of this presentation will focus on how to capitalize on these parental desires.

The first, **communicate often and openly with parents**, can be implemented as follows:

1. Develop concise descriptive materials about your program, including goals, objectives, course structure, prerequisites, students organizations, etc.
2. Work toward admission standards for all advanced programs, admission should require the equivalent of a full multidisciplinary team meeting. This team should consist of at least academic and vocational instructors, guidance counselors, parents and other identified specialists.
3. Provide a course syllabus and class calendar of events. These should include times when parents are expected to be school such as a parent's night and open house.
4. Prepare a list of materials and tools that would help the student and parent complete homework.

5. Establish a plan for the systematic reporting of academic progress. This plan should provide at least a very early report, mid-term progress reports as well as the traditional summary "grade card."

6. Establish a plan for early contact with parents of any behavioral problems. This should be consistent with school policy and administrators should be aware of your actions.

7. Be conspicuous at community related school functions such as open house, social events, etc.

8. Become active in your local PTA.

The second item, **regularly assign homework**, can be implemented as follows:

1. Develop as part of your instructional program a wide range of homework, to include text reading, related library reading, video tapes, problems, exercises, data gathering, etc. Research indicates this is one of the best learning experiences provided by the school. Many technology teachers include little or no homework in their instruction.

2. The Home and School Institute suggests the teacher provide activities for implementation in the home or community that parallel but not duplicate in school work. Example: "The Sidewalk Superintendent" - An activity in which students are to develop a picture story of the ongoing work at a local construction site.

3. Develop a plan accounting for each homework assignment in your grading. To be effective, homework must have a deadline, be graded and returned promptly. A student notebook is ideal here.
4. Try to involve parents in the completion of homework having them monitor progress, give personal interviews, etc.

The third, **encourage parent participation**, can be implemented as follows:

1. Develop a list of ways parents can help in your program including:
   - One time experiences, such as creating a community resources directory.
   - Occasional involvement, such as telephoning, assistance with Technology Student Association club activities.
   - Regular involvement, such as tutoring.
2. Solicit parental involvement, directly ask for volunteers to assist in instructional activities.
3. Include parents on all advisory/craft committees.
4. Allow parents to assume a decision-making role in such activities as textbook selection.

Often the technology teacher will find that some parents will need to be taught how they can help in their child's schooling. In order to teach these parents or adult learners, you must know their needs. Their needs differ greatly from younger learners. Research in adult education has identified the following characteristics of adult learning that teachers need to be aware of:

1. Adults tend to be self-directed - that is, they usually know what they need to learn.
2. Adults expect to use their life experiences to solve problems.

3. Adults learn best through life problems rather than traditional subjects.

4. Adults want feedback on how well they are meeting their goals.

These characteristics can be applied in any of the strategies identified to improve home involvement. (Rich, 1987)

In closing, our schools are often compared to Japanese schools and on a recent visit to Japan, the U.S. 1989 National Teacher of the Year, Terry Weeks, said he observed a much deeper commitment to education in Japan than he has observed in this country. He believes providing the best possible education for Japanese youth is a deep-seated cultural value. The article goes on:

> "No where is that value more obvious than in parental involvement in education. Neighborhood schools are an integral part of the community. Parent-teacher ties are close and mutually supportive. PTA's are active."

Parental support extends beyond the traditional school, Mr. Weeks points out. Many, if not most, parents pay extra for supplemental instruction after school hours, either with private tutors or through private "cram schools."

> "Supplemental instruction is aimed primarily at helping students score well on achievement tests. Placement testing in middle grades determines whether a student will enroll in an academic or vocational track in high school. High school exit testing determines whether a student will be admitted to a university."

Mr. Weeks also reported that Japanese educators feel our education is better than theirs in that we treat students as individuals and encourage creativity. Just maybe, if we can get better parental involvement in education we can have the best of both cultures.

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